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Voltage-controlled oscillator with an LC-resonant circuit

The invention concerns a voltage-controlled oscillator with an LC-resonant circuit, in particular for implementing integrated voltage-controlled oscillators for the lower GHz range.

Integrated circuits involve using voltage-controlled oscillators which
5 are mostly in the form of ring oscillators or LC-oscillators. Ring oscillators are distinguished by a high degree of frequency tunability. That advantage however is impaired by a strong phase noise and a severe phase jitter. In the case of LC-oscillators frequency tunability is predominantly implemented by means of variable capacitors, for example
10 capacitor diodes. Those oscillators admittedly involve a lower level of phase noise and a lesser degree of phase jitter, but frequency tunability is in most cases seriously reduced.

JP 093 215 38 A describes a voltage-controlled LC-oscillator circuit in which a part of the inductance is short-circuited by means of a
15 switching transistor for given periods of time, whereby the inductive component is reduced at times in such a way that alternate operation of the frequency in two frequency bands is possible.

Apart from the switching operation which is substantially slower than the period duration in the desired frequency range, such an
20 arrangement does not permit continuous tuning of the frequency in a wide frequency range.

A similar principle is also described in: A. Kral et al "RF-CMOS-Oscillators with Switched Tuning", Custom Integrated Circuits Conference (CICC'98), pp. 555 - 558. In the case of a fully integrated CMOS-
25 oscillator for a frequency range of between 1 and 2 GHz a tuning range of about 26% is achieved by switching between a plurality of discrete inductance values.

Besides the use of switching elements which adversely influence phase noise and phase jitter, that arrangement is seen to suffer from the disadvantage that, in spite of the circuit being of a high degree of complexity, it was only possible to achieve a relatively limited frequency
5 tuning range. In addition the switching of discrete inductance values means that it is only possible to achieve quasi-continuous frequency tuning which has to be supplemented by capacitive tuning.

In integrated radio systems the oscillator must enjoy a relatively great tuning range in order to compensate for technology and
10 temperature fluctuations and to cover the receiving and transmitting band respectively.

With operating voltages in modern technologies becoming smaller and smaller the available voltage range for the control voltage of the voltage-controlled oscillator (VCO) is becoming progressively smaller.
15 That means that the necessary sensitivity of the oscillation frequency of the oscillator in relation to control voltage variations increases. The consequence of this is that, upon integration of the VCO into a phase-locked loop (PLL) the noise of the control voltage causes severe phase noise. That problem is becoming more acute with down-scaling of the
20 technology, which goes hand-in-hand with the reduction in the supply voltage.

Therefore the object of the invention is to propose a voltage-controlled oscillator with an LC-resonant circuit, with which the disadvantages of the state of the art are overcome and with which
25 continuous frequency tunability in a wide range can be achieved in particular with a low level of phase noise and a low level of phase jitter.

In accordance with the invention that object is attained in that, in a voltage-controlled oscillator with an LC-resonant circuit there can be periodically switched in parallel and/or in series with at least one inductor
30 a further inductor by way of a switching means actuated with the oscillator frequency and that a control input of the switching means is connected to

a variable dc voltage. Advantageously a further inductor can be periodically switched in parallel and/or series with a plurality of inductors by way of a respective controllable switching means. The controllable switching means are periodically in a conducting state and then a non-conducting state. They are controllable by a variable control voltage. In that respect the relationship of the duration of the conducting state and the duration of the non-conducting state of the switching means is variable within an oscillation period of the oscillator in dependence on the value of the control voltage. In accordance with the relationship of the duration of the conducting state and the duration of the non-conducting state of the switching means within an oscillation period of the oscillator the time-averaged effective inductance is variable in dependence on the value of the control voltage. The controllable switching means are advantageously switching transistors and in particular MOSFETs whose gate terminals are connected to the input of the control voltage and whose source terminals are connected to parts of the circuit arrangement carrying the oscillator frequency. Advantageously the oscillator is constructed using a CMOS or bipolar technology and can preferably be used in frequency synthesizers for wide-band systems and for multi-band uses and for clock generation and clock recovery in high-speed circuits such as for example microprocessors and memories.

The teaching of the invention involves replacing the coils in a resonant circuit by pairs of coils which are connected in parallel and/or in series and of which a respective one of the coils is connected to a switch which is periodically opened and closed. That means that in each case only one coil or the parallel and/or series connection of both coils is operative. The period of time during which the switch is closed within an oscillation period is controlled by a control voltage. The time-averaged effective inductance can thus be altered in a wide range. This results in the desired continuous frequency tunability.

The features of the invention, besides being set forth in the claims, are also to be found in the description and the drawings, in which respect the individual features each on their own or in pluralities in the form of sub-combinations represent patentable configurations in respect of which protection is claimed herein. Embodiments by way of example of the invention are described in greater detail hereinafter. In the accompanying drawings:

Figure 1 shows a voltage-controlled oscillator according to the invention,

Figure 2 shows a diagram of the oscillator frequency as a function of the control voltage,

Figure 3 shows a further embodiment of the oscillator according to the invention,

Figure 4 shows a voltage-controlled oscillator according to the invention,

Figure 5 shows a further embodiment by way of example of the oscillator according to the invention,

Figure 6 shows a combination circuit of a VCO with a PLL, and

Figure 7 shows a combination circuit of a VCO with two PLLs.

Example 1:

Figure 1 shows an LC-oscillator according to the invention with two co-operating semiconductor switches and a capacitor C. The inductors L_1 are arranged in two branches. Associated with each of the two inductors L_1 is a respective further inductor L_2 which can be switched in parallel with the first inductors L_1 by way of a respective switching means S_v . The gate terminals G of the switching means S_v which are in the form of MOSFETs are connected to an input V_{con} for a control voltage U_{con} while the source terminals S are connected to the output of the oscillator, which carries the oscillator frequency.

Figure 2 shows a diagram in respect of the oscillator frequency in GHz as a function of the control voltage U_{con} .

The mode of operation of the oscillator according to the invention is as follows: the two switching means S_v , in this embodiment being two MOSFETs, are opened at a low control voltage U_{con} during the major part of an oscillation period of the oscillator. That state occurs as long as the
5 gate-source voltage does not exceed the switching point of the switching means S_v . During the duration of the non-conducting state of the switching means S_v only the first inductors L_1 are effective. For a small part of the oscillation period the gate-source voltage exceeds the switching point of the switching means S_v . For the duration of the now
10 conducting state of the switching means S_v the further inductors L_2 are connected in parallel with the first inductors L_1 whereby the total value of the effective inductance reduces as a function of time. In accordance with the relationship of the longer duration of the non-conducting state of the switching means S_v to the shorter duration of the conducting state
15 thereof, there is a relatively great, time-averaged effective inductance. The oscillator frequency resulting therefrom is correspondingly low.

With an increased control voltage U_{con} the two switching means S_v are opened only during a smaller part of the oscillation period and are closed during the major part thereof. In accordance with the relationship
20 of the shorter duration of the non-conducting state of the switching means S_v to the longer duration of the conducting state thereof there is therefore a relatively low, time-averaged effective inductance. The oscillator frequency resulting therefrom is correspondingly high.

As a special case it will be assumed that the inductance and quality
25 of the pairs of coils L_1 and L_2 are identical and involve the same magnitudes L_1 and Q_1 . For the situation involving ideal switching means S_v , the following then apply in regard to the inductance L and the quality Q of the overall arrangement comprising L_1 , L_2 and the switch:

$L = L_1$, $Q = Q_1$ when the switching means S_v are opened, and
30 $L = L_1/2$, $Q = Q_1$ when the switching means S_v are closed.

Closure of the switching means S_v therefore causes halving of the inductance which is crucial in terms of the oscillator frequency. The quality of the pairs of coils L_1 and L_2 is equal to the quality of the individual coil. If it is considered that the following approximately applies for the oscillator frequency:

$$f_0 = 1./\sqrt{L},$$

the following relationship is found for the lower limit frequency $f_{0,\min}$ and for the upper limit frequency $f_{0,\max}$ for the frequency tuning range:

$$f_{0,\max} = \sqrt{2} \cdot f_{0,\min}$$

The following similarly applies for the general case of coils which are not necessarily the same:

$$f_{0,\max} = \sqrt{(1 + L_1/L_2)} \cdot f_{0,\min}$$

Thus the frequency tuning range can still be further increased by the choice of a greater ratio of L_1/L_2 .

Figure 2 shows the simulated frequency tuning range in the form of a diagram showing the oscillator frequency f_0 as a function of the control voltage U_{con} for $L_1/L_2 = 2$. In this embodiment the frequency tuning range is about 1.25 GHz, that is to say more than an octave.

The oscillator according to the invention can be implemented in a fully integrated configuration both using CMOS technology and also bipolar technology. It can advantageously be used in frequency synthesizers for wide-band systems and for multi-band uses and for clock production and clock recovery in high-speed circuits such as microprocessors and memories.

Example 2:

As a further embodiment by way of example Figure 3 shows a circuit arrangement of the oscillator according to the invention with two respective first inductors L_1 , L_3 , in relation to each of which a further respective inductor L_2 can be connected in parallel.

Example 3:

Figure 4 shows an LC-oscillator according to the invention with two co-operating semiconductor switches and a capacitor C. The inductors L_1 are arranged in two branches. Associated with each of the two inductors L_1 is a respective further inductor L_2 which can be connected in series with the first inductors L_1 by a respective switching means S_v . The gate terminals G of the switching means S_v which are in the form of MOSFETs are connected to an input V_{con} for a control voltage U_{con} while the source terminals S are connected to the output of the oscillator, which carries the oscillator frequency.

When the switching means S_v is closed the total inductance is of a lower value than when the switching means S_v is opened. The switching means S_v is modulated at the oscillation frequency.

The mode of operation of the oscillator according to the invention is as follows: the two switching means S_v , in this embodiment being two MOSFETs, are opened with a low voltage U_{con} at the input V_{con} during the major part of an oscillation period of the oscillator. That state occurs as long as the gate-source voltage does not exceed the switching point of the switching means S_v . During the duration of the non-conducting state of the switching means S_v the further inductors L_2 are effective, in relation to the first inductors L_1 , whereby the total value of the effective inductance is increased. For a small part of the oscillation period the gate-source voltage exceeds the switching point of the switching means S_v . Only the first inductors L_1 are effective for the duration of the now conducting state of the switching means S_v . In accordance with the relationship of the longer duration of the non-conducting state of the switching means S_v to the shorter duration of the conducting state thereof, there is a relatively high, time-averaged effective inductance. The oscillator frequency resulting therefrom is correspondingly low.

With an increased control voltage U_{con} the two switching means S_v are only opened during a smaller part of the oscillation period and closed

during the greater part thereof. In accordance with the relationship of the shorter duration of the non-conducting state of the switching means S_v to the longer duration of the conducting state thereof, there is a relatively low, time-averaged effective inductance. The oscillator frequency
5 resulting therefrom is correspondingly higher than with a lower control voltage U_{con} .

Example 4:

Figure 5 shows a combination of inductive and capacitive tuning. Besides inductive tuning, capacitive tuning is also possible.

10 Inductive tuning is based on the principle described in the preceding embodiments. In this embodiment the inductors L_1 and L_2 are connected in parallel. The two switching means S_v are opened at a low control voltage U_{con} at the input V_{con} during the major part of an oscillation period of the oscillator. That state occurs as long as the gate-source voltage
15 does not exceed the switching point of the switching means S_v . During the duration of the non-conducting state of the switching means S_v only the first inductors L_1 are effective. For a small part of the oscillation period the gate-source voltage exceeds the switching point of the switching means S_v . For the duration of the now conducting state of the
20 switching means S_v the further inductors L_2 are connected in parallel with the first inductors L_1 whereby the total value of the effective inductance decreases as a function of time. In accordance with the relationship of the longer duration of the non-conducting state of the switching means S_v to the shorter duration of the conducting state thereof there is a relatively
25 high time-averaged effective inductance. The oscillator frequency resulting therefrom is correspondingly low.

With an increased control voltage U_{con} the two switching means S_v are opened only during a smaller part of the oscillation period and are closed during the major part thereof. In accordance with the relationship
30 of the shorter duration of the non-conducting state of the switching means S_v to the longer duration of the conducting state thereof there is a

relatively low, time-averaged effective inductance. The oscillator frequency resulting therefrom is correspondingly high.

To provide for capacitive tuning integrated in the resonant circuit is a variable capacitance which in this embodiment is embodied by means of two p-MOSFETs M_1 , M_2 in the form of variable capacitor diodes. The control input V_{con} permits tuning of the frequency on the basis of the principle described in the preceding embodiments while a tuning voltage U_{tune} at the tuning input V_{tune} determines the oscillation frequency by way of the time-averaged capacitance. It is now possible to use the control input V_{con} in order to compensate for technology fluctuations while the tuning input V_{tune} is used for fine tuning by means of a phase-locked loop PLL, as shown in Figure 6. In this case, the tuning input V_{tune} of the VCO is connected to the output of the phase-locked loop PLL and the oscillator output of the voltage-controlled oscillator VCO is connected to the input of the phase-locked loop PLL.

In this case it is possible to use a relatively low VCO-gain $K = df_0/dU_{tune}$. In that way the effect of noise within the phase-locked loop PLL on the phase noise of the voltage-controlled oscillator VCO is minimized. The noise of the inductive control voltage at the control input V_{con} can be blocked by means of a large capacitance.

Example 5:

A modified variant is illustrated in Figure 7. There, the oscillator output is connected to the inputs of two phase-locked loops PLL1 and PLL2. The tuning input V_{tune} of the voltage-controlled oscillator VCO is connected to the output of the phase-locked loop PLL1 while the control input V_{con} of the voltage-controlled oscillator VCO is connected to the output of the phase-locked loop PLL2.

The phase-locked loop PLL2 serves to compensate for technology and temperature fluctuations while the phase-locked loop PLL1 serves for fine tuning of the oscillation frequency.

This method is particularly suitable for a modulation method which is referred to as frequency hopping. This is a special code division multiple access method (CDMA) in which the transmitting and receiving frequency are altered in respect of time in accordance with a
5 predetermined code. This can be implemented by means of the phase-locked loop PLL1 while the very slow phase-locked loop PLL2 provides for coarse setting of the frequency.

A use of the invention is the "Bluetooth" standard for wireless communication over short distances. The frequency hopping method is
10 used there. The demands in terms of phase noise are not too high there, which makes an integrated CMOS-solution a possibility.

A voltage-controlled oscillator with an LC-resonant circuit was described in the foregoing description by means of specific embodiments. It should be noted however that the present invention is not limited to the
15 details of the description in the specific embodiments as modifications and alterations are claimed within the scope of the claims.